

Alaska Division of Public Health

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

Fact Sheet

A New Disease Called SARS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is investigating a new disease called severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The disease was first reported among people in Guangdong Province (China), Hanoi (Vietnam), and Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China). It has since spread to other countries. As of April 7, more than 100 cases of SARS had been reported in the United States. This fact sheet provides basic information about the disease and what is being done to combat its spread.

Number of Suspected Cases (as of April 7, 2003)

Worldwide there have been 2,601 cases reported; 141 of those have been reported in the United States.

Number of Deaths Resulting from SARS (as of April 7, 2003)

Worldwide, 98 deaths from suspected SARS cases have been reported; no deaths in the United States have been attributed to SARS.

Symptoms of SARS

In general, SARS begins with a fever greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]. Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also experience mild respiratory symptoms. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough and have trouble breathing.

How SARS Spreads

Public health experts think that SARS is spread by close contact between people. SARS is most likely spread when someone sick with the disease coughs droplets into the air and someone else breathes them in. It is possible that SARS also can spread more broadly through the air or from touching objects that have become contaminated.

Who is at Risk for SARS

Cases of SARS continue to be reported mainly among people who have had direct close contact with an infected person, such as those sharing a household with a SARS patient and health care workers who did not use infection control procedures while taking care of a SARS patient. In the United States, there is no indication of community spread at this time. CDC continues to monitor this situation very closely.

Possible Cause of SARS

Scientists at CDC and other laboratories have detected a previously unrecognized coronavirus in patients with SARS. While the new coronavirus is still the leading hypothesis for the cause of SARS, other viruses are still under investigation as potential causes.

What you should do to protect yourself

CDC has issued interim guidelines for patients with suspected SARS in the healthcare setting and in households. These guidelines may change as we learn more about SARS. If you get sick with the symptoms described above and have traveled to mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Hanoi

(Viet Nam) in the past two weeks, or been in close contact with someone who might have SARS, see your health care provider and follow the guidelines found in the websites listed below.

What CDC is Doing About SARS

CDC is working closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners in a global effort to address the SARS outbreak. For its part, CDC has taken the following actions:

- Activated its Emergency Operations Center to provide round-the-clock coordination and response.
- Committed more than 250 medical experts and support staff to work on the SARS response.
- Deployed medical officers, epidemiologists, and other specialists to assist with on-site investigations around the world.
- Provided ongoing assistance to state and local health departments in investigating possible cases of SARS in the United States.
- Conducted extensive laboratory testing of clinical specimens from SARS patients to identify the cause of the disease.
- Initiated a system for distributing health alert notices to travelers who may have been exposed to cases of SARS.

What the Alaska Division of Public Health is Doing About SARS

The Division of Public Health has taken the following actions:

- Actively distributing CDC health advisories and alerts to healthcare providers and hospitals throughout the state
- Collaborated with the CDC Arctic Investigations Program to meet international passenger flights at the Ted Stevens International Airport, to screen for crew or passengers who have respiratory symptoms; and collaborated with the Municipality of Anchorage, Department of Health and Human Services to develop a plan to transport and monitor an ill crew or passengers removed from an international flight.
- Collaborated with all three civilian hospitals in Anchorage to develop a plan to accept, isolate and treat an ill crew member or passenger from an international flight, or any patient who presents with an illness that meets the SARS case definition.
- Prepared a collection kit complete with specimen containers, personal respirators (N95 masks), and instructions, to facilitate a rapid response by the Surveillance & Outbreak Team, should a possible SARS patient be reported.
- Collaborated with the Alaska State Public Health Laboratories to collect and transport clinical specimens from patients suspected to have SARS.

For more information, visit the DPH Section of Epidemiology website at www.akepi.org, the CDC website at www.cdc.gov, or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)